THEME OF PROTEST IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON AND BAPSI SIDHWA

A SYNOPSIS

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As a social being, human is given to mutual trust, love and recognition but when he is ill-treated or discriminated on the basis of religious hypocrisy, class privilege, Individual prejudices etc, he adopts protest as a natural phenomenon to lodge his reaction to natural injustice. Protest is an expression or declaration of disapproval or dissent against something wrong. It may have various connotations and implications. The psychologists have analysed its dynamics in different ways which it finds an intresting and categorical representation in politics as well as literature.

A protest is an expression of objection, by words or by actions, to particular events, socio-political order, policies or situations. It can take many different forms, from individual statements to mass demonstrations. Protestors may organize a protest as a way of publicly making their opinions heard in an attempt to influence public opinion or government policy, or they may undertake a direct action in attempt to influence public opinion or government policy, or they may undertake a direct action in an attempt to directly effect the desired changes themselves. Where protests are a part of a systematic and peaceful campaign to achieve a particular objective, and involve the use of pressure as well as persuasion, they go beyond mere protest and may be better described as cases of civil resistance or non violent resistance.

Various forms of self-expression and protest are sometimes restricted by governmental policy, economic circumstances, religious orthodoxy, social structures, or media monopoly. When such restrictions occur, protests may assume the form of open civil disobedience, more subtle forms of resistance against the restrictions, or may spill over into other areas, such as, culture and emigration.

Human temper such as anger is an automatic response to ill treatment. It is a feedback mechanism in which an unpleasant stimulus is met with an unpleasant response. Anger can

potentially mobilize psychological resources and boost determination towards correction of wrong behaviour, promotion of social justice, communication of negative sentiment and redress of grievances. It can also facilitate patience. On the other hand, anger can be destructive when it does not find its appropriate outlet in expression. Anger, in its form, impairs one's ability to process information and to exert cognitive control over this behaviour. An angry person may lose his/ her objectivity, empathy, prudence or thoughtfulness and may cause harm to others.

Literature has always served as a very effective means to project various notions of protest. So far as English Literature is concerned, the expression of protest has been a very common weapon of writers and poets for voicing disagreement and dissent against various forms or injustice; whether it be William Langland, John Milton, Chales Dickens, Alice Walker or others. With the progress of civilization and increase in technology, the scientific temper affected the human psyche to a great extent. The advent of democracy brought in the sense of individualism and protest also became a means to project the need for equality and reaction against injustice.

Social protest literature of the nineteenth century was the product of the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the Western countries, along with the rise of social thoughts. It may be divided into two broad categories: literature that advocates or oppspes certain types of socio-political reforms. These broad categories include a variety of works that treat a range of subjects, including slavery, women's rights, minority rights, poverty, aristocracy, racism, and the immigrant- experience. The famous twentieth century writer George Orwell in his essay "Why I Write" rightly points out the purpose of literature when he writes, "Prose is a window pane".

Racism breeding the cult of protest, started in America when the white masters of the land brought the first Africans in chains and used their labour to enrich their coffers. As a result, the black people soon ceased to exist as human beings in the white world in an illuminating study of the origin of racism in the United States, Joel Kovel says that the white master "first reduced the human self of his black slave to a body and then the body to a thing; he dehumanized his slave, made him quantifiable, and thereby absorbed him into a rising world market of productive exchange."[1]

All that was left to the blacks was their African soul which was also taken away by imposing the white values on them. With the breakdown of their native values, they lost their authentic self and almost invariably fostered feelings of inferiority. The whites created the institutions which the blacks were finally ready to live by. This covert form of racism, maintains Plakkoottam, "was doubly injurious to the black race in that not much notice was taken of its invisibly corrosive nature."[2] This was the first step towards the establishment of racism as an inseparable part of the white American civilization.

To be black and that too a female was to suffer from the twin disadvantages of racial discrimination and pronounces gender bias. Being black, the African women suffered from racism; being females they were the victims of sexual atrocities at the hands of the white masters as well as the blacks, and being former slaves, the white establishment forced them to live on meager resources and were compelled to remain poor. In short, the black women in America were made victims of triple jeopardy- racism, sexism and classism. To lodge the protest of the black women against the triple jeopardy, the Black Feminist Organization was formed in 1953

[1] Koel, Joel. *White Racism: A Psychohistory.*(New York: Columbia University Press,1984), 18. Print.
[2] Plakkoottam, A.J. Racial and Gender Discrimination in Fiction by Afro- Americans. *Indian Journal of American Studies*, 20, 1990) 13. Print.

and the Black Women Organization in 1973 in which all women belonging to all sections of black community participated to fight the injustice hurled upon them in various forms.

The African- American literature is the body of literature produced in the Unites States by the writers of African descent. It begins with the works of such late eighteenth century writers as Phillis Wheatly and Olaudah Equiano, reaching early high points with slave narratives of the nineteenth century. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was a time of flowering of literature have been recognized by the highest awards, including the Nobel Prize to Toni Morrison and award-winning Walter Mosley being ranked among the top writers in the United States. Among the themes and issues explored in this literature are the role of African Americans within the larger American society, African-American culture, racism, slavery and equality.

As the African- Americans place in American society has changed over the centuries, so has the focus of the African- American literature. Before the American Civil War, the literature primarily consisted of memoirs by people who had escaped from slavery; the genre of slave narratives included accounts of life under slavery and the path of justice and redemption to freedom. At the turn of the twentieth century, non-fiction works by authors, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington debated whether to confront or appease racist attitudes in the United States. During the American Civil Rights Movement, authors such as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about the issues of racial segregation and black nationalism to protest against racism.

Today, the African-American literature has become accepted as a Saga an integral part of the American literature, with books such as Roots: The Saga of an American Family by Alex

Haley, *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker, which won the Pulitzer Prize; and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison achieving both the best-selling and the award –winning status.

Toni Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio, where her parents had moved to escape from the problems of southern racism. Her family were migrants, sharecroppers on both sides. Morrison grew up in the black community of Lorain. She spent her childhood in the Midwest and read voraciously, from Jane Austen to Tolstoy. Morrrison's father, George Wofford, was a welder, and told her folktales of the black community, transferring his African –American heritage to another generation. In 1949, she entered Howard University in Washington, D.C., America's most distinguished black college. There, she changed her name from "Chloe" to "Toni" explaining that people found "Chloe" too difficult to pronounce. She is an American novelist, editor, and professor. Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogue, and richly detailed characters. Among her best novels are *The Bluest Eye (1970), Sula (1987), Song of Solomom (1977),* and *Beloved* in 1987 and the Nobel Prize in 1933 for her outstanding contribution in literature.

Morrison's novels embody the protest against the traumatic conditions under which African- Americans lived in the white America. There are societal and psychological restrictions that have critically affected the lives of the blacks in general and the African-American women in particular. Right from the days of slavery, the blacks, irrespective of sex, had realized the bitter reality of racism judged from the white man's standards of life and beauty. The black man's life had become unbearable. Sexism, more oppressive both physically and mentally, was the cause of grievance to the black women who were sexually exploited by both the black and the white men. Just as blacks as a group were relegated to an underclass by virtue of their race, so were women relegated to a separate caste on account of their sex.

It is natural that Toni Morrison, with her political commitment to her people and her aesthetic responsibility to her art of writing fiction, and also being a sufferer of racism, protested against the notion of race, gender and class, the three major forms of oppression of the blacks in America. Morrison's novels document the author's awareness and concern for the historical conditions that sparked the national struggle of the African people against oppression and exploitation, thereby revealing her heightened consciousness of the inter – relationship of race, gender, and class. Though all these three elements race, gender, and class are present in the novels of Toni Morrison, the emphasis on them varies from novel to novel.

The Bluest Eye, her first novel, indicates a black girl's quest for white values. Pecola, a black girl, wants to have blue eyes because she relates beauty to being loved and believes that if she possesses blue eyes, the cruelty in her life will be replaced by affection and respect. Pecola's mother, who works as a housekeeper in a white family, lavishes all her love and affection on her employer's children and beats her own daughter just because of her ugliness. The ultimate act of brutalization and betrayal for Pecola comes when Cholly, her own father rapes her. His tenderness and protectiveness, however, unfortunately slip into lust and rage which he directs at Pecola and all those like her bore witness to her failure. Thus Pecola, protests against all the gestures/acts of illtreatment by remaining silent and goes mad, believing that her long cherished dream of having blue eyes has fulfilled. Therefore, the novel projects the black's protest against racism which is the primary source of oppression to Africans.

In her next novel *Sula*, Morrison depicts the quest of a female protagonist, Sula, for creating her own self and coming to terms with identity as a black woman. Morrison demonstrates the difficulties that black women face when they try to explore different aspects of their 'self'. Sula Peace, lives with her mother in Hannah in Bottom, the black community in Ohio. Sula and Nel

are bosom friends. After high school, Nel chooses to marry and settles into the conventional role of wife and mother. Sula follows a wildly divergent path and lives a life of fierce independence with total disregard for social conventions.

Shortly after Nel's wedding, Sula leaves the bottom for a period of ten years. She has many affairs, some with white man too. However, she finds people following the same boring routines elsewhere, so she returns back to the Bottom and Nel. After she returns the town people start blaming Sula for things over which she has no control, such as the little boy that fell down the steps and the old man who swallowed the chicken bone. These are nothing but careless accidents. However, because the town sets hatred for Sula, they all rally against her. Thus Sula, protests against all social conventions by remaining quite and does what she feels correct. Therefore, the novel embodies the protest against the gender oppression by depicting the difficulties faced by Sula in creating her ownself as a black woman.

Morrison's Pultizer Prize winning novel *Beloved*, deals with the life of a female slave, Sethe, who kills her own daughter to prevent her from slavery. One of the most damaging effects of slavery of the black women, is murder of one's own child. Murder becomes Sethe's act of mother love, which she explains by saying "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe."[3] Thus the novel embodies the black men's protest against slavery, racial exploitation, suppression, and also capitalism. Also, Morrison proposes a collective class struggle against capitalism as the only solution for the African people in the white – dominated society which too shows a form of protest in her novels.

[3] Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. (London: Pan,1987) 163. Print.

Jazz, is the story of a faithful wife, Violet who disfigures the face of her husband Joe Trace's beloved Dorcas to protest against the disloyalty of her husband. It is the story of the African women who experience the triple oppression of gender, race, and class. As Joe mourns for Docras, Violet wants to know more about the girl she hates too much. As she goes out in search of Docras's past, to protest against her husband's disloyalty, she finds herself through her relationship with Docras, Alice Manfred and Felice not only lead Violet to self-discovery but also help her work on her relationship with Joe Trace. *Jazz* also gives a dismal picture of the women both of the north as well as the south in 1920s. They were in danger from sexism. Therefore, parents go on sending their daughters north due to the fear of molestation. Jacqueline Jones points out: "Significantly black men mentioned the degraded status of their women folk as one of the prime incentives to migrate, along with low wages and poor educational opportunities for their children. Husbands told of sexual harassment of wives and daughters of white and of other forms of indignities woven in the fabric of southern society."[4] Thus in this novel Joe protests against the disloyalty of her husband in a violent manner, by disfiguring the face of her husband's beloved. On the other hand, the novel also protests against the condition of women in the white dominated society during 1920s and proposes gender solidaity as the only solution which too is a form of protest. With the aim to establish their political authority in India, the British ruthlessly exploited the Indian resources by neglecting the interests of her people which undoubtedly resulted in the growth of Indian Nationalism. The impact of the British rule on the Indian economy was disastrous. The British Government levied exorbitant taxes on Indian farmers, which was a severe blow to the fragile economic status of the poor farmers. The atrocious economic policies of the Government, stimulated the spirit of nationalism in the form

[4] Jones, Jacqueline. *Labour of Love, Labour of Sorrow: Black Women and the Family, From Slavery to the Present*. (New York: Vintage, 1985) 157. Print.

of protest against the British so as to save themselves from the cruel foreign yoke. The educated intellectuals made the common people aware of the ill effects of the economic policies of the British Raj. Thus the growth of the Indian Nationalism received a powerful stimulus in the process of hatred against the Government's inhumane economic policies.

After the First War of Independence, the British followed a divide-and-rule policy, exploiting the differences between the ethnic communities, in order to perpetuate and strengthen their rule in India. In that respect, Indian Muslims were impelled to forge a cultural and political identity separate from the Hindus. Sentiments of the Indian Nationalism were fostered as early as 1885 with formation the Indian National Congress. In order to safeguard its interests, the English bourgeoisie in 1946 proposed to create an independent federal state in India, which would be divided into zones according to religious majorities.

As a result the Muslim league was formed in 1906 under the leadership of Mohmmed Ali Jinnah who adopted the slogan of "Divide and Quit" in contrast to the Congress slogan of "Quit India" during 1942-43, was successful in attaining its objective of getting a separate nation Pakistan where the Muslims would be in majority after India was partitioned and declared independent by the British in August 1947. Spurred by the desire of narrow parochial interests and confident of the fruitful results of the two nation theory, certain leaders in India were lured by gospel of the partition of India.

After, the papers for the Partition were signed ,millions of people sought to rejoin their new country ,convinced by the fact that ,they could no longer live together .nine million Hindus left Pakistan and six million Muslims left India. A million refugees crossed the borders on foot, forming human columns over dozens of miles long, in rags, exhausted, starved, crushed by

sorrow. Others leaving in trains, never arrived. Witnesses described "death trains" filled with mutilated bodies, and the train wheels dripping blood. There were million of deaths in a few months. Those who survived also suffered, becoming refugees, losing fortunes and homes, succumbing to hunger and diseases. Women were raped, and consequently punished when their husbands and families rejected as polluted. The imperialists threw these communities against each other. In doing so, they dug a ditch of hatred, fear and mistrust between the Hindus and Muslims.

Bapsi Sidhwa, born on August 11, 1938 in Karachi witnessed as a young child the gory Partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947. She saw buildings on fire and panicky change in her neighbourhood as the Hindu and and the Sikh neighbours were replaced by the Muslim refugees. Even she show the dead bodies her own eyes as a child. Bapsi Sidhwa's life as a child in Pakistan was very similar to Lenny's life in "*Cracking India"* which is her third novel. Like lenny , she had a polio as a child , and spent a lot of time with servants. Growing up with polio, she was educated at home until the age of fifteen, devoting herself to voracious reading. She then went to earn a B.A degree from Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore. Being a Parsi Zorastrian ,a distinctive minority , the atmosphere of her house was much restricted ;she was not allowed to come before her brother's friends as they were usually male and during her childhood, less freedom was given to her owing to her female existence.

Sidhwa continued winning laurels in the field of writing. She has also been awarded the Sitara – I- Imtiaz, Pakistan's highest honour in the arts. She also utilizes her position as an acclaimed writer to make numerous public statements in the Pakistani media by protesting against the repressive measures against women and also the minority communities. She has worked as the Voluntary Secretary in the Destitute Women and Children's home in Lahore for

years. She was appointed to the Advisory Committee on Women's Development by late Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

As a third world author, Bapsi Sidhwa, like Mulk Raj Anand, does feel that the author has a vital role to play in a society. She chooses various themes for her novels, like, the rigidity of Parsi culture and traditions, oppression of women, or the Partition crises against which she lodges her categorical protest in her novels.

Sidhwa's novel, *The Crow Eaters*, reveals the rigidity of Parsi culture and traditions and also brings forth the changes around them. There are various instances throughout the novel which reveal the rigidity of Parsi culture and traditions. As Putli, wife of Faredoon, never concedes the idea of walking ahead of her husband, but the daughter of Putli, Yasmin feels no problem in doing so. To marry outside the community, is considered unbearable among the Parsees. But Yazdi, the son of Faredoon, dares to love the Anglo- Saxon girl. When forced to leave the girl, he leaves the family and renounces the faith as well. Another significant example of Parsi rigidity is witnessed at the time of the death of Soli, the eldest child of Faredoon:

> The priest's dog, adopted by him because of the two eye – like spots above his eyes, was brought into the room. It is believed that his four eyes can ward off the evil spirits and can detect the faintest hint of life; a precious faculty in premedical days when corpses were inclined to recover and sit up.[5]

Thus Bapsi by exploring the Parsi paradox in her novel protests against the rigidity of Parsi culture and traditional norms.

[5] Sidhwa, Bapsi. *The Crow Eaters*. (Delhi: Penguin Books,1990) 177. Print.

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *The Bride,* deals with the repression of women in the patriarchal Pakistani society. The novel is based on a real story narrated to Sidhwa when with her family; she stayed at an army camp in the remotest regions of the Karakoram mountains. Sidhwa with the help of her imagination and craftsmanship fictionalized this experience. She gives this sad tale a 'habitation and local name'. The girl is named as Zaitoon. This novel provides a realistic picture of the treatment of women in Pakistani society. When Qasim, her father, decides to get her married to a tribal man, Miriam opposes it and she forces Zaitoon to reject her father's decision. But Zaitoon neglects her suggestion by mentioning, women are not supposed to bother about their own lives and expected to leave it at the hands of the patriarchy. In the patriarchy society, women should respect their husbands like Gods. Similarly, Zaitoon worships Sahki, "she wanted to touch not his face but his feet, to rub her lashes on the soles of his feet, to rub her lashes on the soles of his feet and kiss them; to hold his legs to her bossom in an ecstasy of devotion".[6] After Zaitoon's marriage, she faces Sahki's brutish nature. He beats her on the slightest pretext. But at last, when she loses her patience, she decides to run away from that place. Even though she knows that death will be a punishment for such a crime. She decides to leave that hell. She simply does not wish to be a role model of Hamida always cowering, frightened to death and at the mercy of the cruel code of honour of man.

She instinctively chooses to be herself like the eagle bird with the broken wings trying to fly into the sky. As the bird cannot be easily caged or tamed even if it is maimed. In the same manner her protest against the patriarchal society was very strong, and at last, she wins by her sheer will power, "It 's the strength of nature- a force, perhaps of God, within one".[7]

[6] Sidhwa, Bapsi. *The Pakistani Bride*. (New Delhi: Penguin Publication,1990) 164. Print.
[7] Ibid. 229. Print.

Thus, in this novel, Bapsi Sidhwa protests against the patriarchal society as well as the masculine ideology which makes people believe that men are born to dominate and women are born to be suppressed.

In *Cracking India*, Bapsi Sidhwa shows how friends and neighbours turn out to be enemies overnight. A Muslim village Pir Pindo is attacked by the Sikhs killing the Muslims men and women. Sikh families in Lahore are attacked and the chain reaction continues. People like Hari and Moti become converts to save their lives. Ayah's lover Masseur is killed .She shows that the communal frenzy has a distorting effect on the masses and leads to the feelings of distrust and frenzy. In such an atmosphere of communal frenzy and hatred , simple people like Ice- Candy man lose their temper when they see the mutilated bodies of Muslims and revenge in the form of protest becomes the only motivation in his life. Friendships and personal relations are forgotten.

The pattern of communal harmony has been replaced by the pattern of fear and suspicion between the two communities. It is in this frenzied atmosphere that the Akali leader, master Tara Singh, visits Lahore. Addressing a vast congregation outside the Assembly Chambers he shouts "We will see how the Muslims swine get Pakistan! We will fight to thelast man! We will show them who will leave Lahore! Raj karega Khalsa, aki rahi n koi !"[8] his address is greeted with the roar of "Pakistan Murdabad! Death of Pakistan! Sat Sri Akal! Bolay se nihal!"[9] the Muslims, in turn shout to protest against Sikhs, "So? We'll play Holi with their blood! Ho-o-oli with their blood!"[10] with both the communities having taken up their positions, the ensuing festival of Holi becomes a blood soaked festival. The atmosphere of communal amity that existed before the

[8] Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Cracking India*. (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 1991) 143.Print.
[9] Ibid. Print.
[10] Ibid. 144. Print.

Baisakhi of that year got shattered in the blood bath of Holi during the Partition. Thus Bapsi Sidhwa, by showing the negative impact of communalism on people as well as the country makes a sound protest against religious obscurism and communal frenzy in this novel.

The novel, *Water* opens in the Pre-Independent, tumultuous India. It exposes the hypocrisy of the Indian society in 1930's, especially concerning women, particularly the unfortunate widows. The novel exposes the dark morbid side of human society. The story revolves round the tragic life of poor Chuiya, who is married off to a forty one years old man at a young age of eight years even before she could can understand the real meaning of marriage. No sooner does her husband dies then she becomes a cursed burden so her mother-in-law and her own father also abandons her at a widow ashram leaving her to live on the mercy of tyrannical Madhumati, the matron of the widow ashram.

The ashram is the not the suitable place to live. The widows are expected to shave their heads, give up all their material possessions and clothes themselves in a plain white saree without a benefit of a blouse, they live on just one meal a day. On festival days, they get alms by temple-goers, and on regular days, they are given a cup of rice and a fistful of lentils for every eight hour of singing and dancing in the temple. For many widows, this is the only means of sustenance. Thus this novel by exposing the true condition of the widows, the novelist marks her protest against the ill treatment given to the widows.

Both the writers are well established in the realm of fiction. They have been profusely worked upon and their works have been explored from different angles in different countries. Though protest is a common feature in the novels of the two celebrated novelists yet their treatment and their presentation of protest in their novels involves many similarities and

dissimilarities which will make an interesting study in the proposed work. The purpose of the study is to put them in close scrutiny in the light of the given topic is to yield something new and interesting which may be of some use to the scholars in future.

Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

(a) To make a socio- psychological study of the notion of the protest and determine its meaning in the context of the topic.

(b) To investigate the contemporary socio- political, economic, religious and literally aspect of the ages and countries of the two novelists.

(c) To examine the important factors affecting the psyche and shaping the personalities of Toni Morrison and Bapsi Sidhwa.

(d) To explore the notion of the protest in the selected novels of the two novelists.

(e) To evaluate the treatment of the two novelists vis-à-vis protest in terms of characterization and the use of language.

(f) To draw a definite conclusion based upon a close comparative study of Toni Morrison and Bapsi Sidhwa with reference to the topic.

CHAPTER- SCHEME

Chapter-1 Introduction

Chapter-2 Making of the Novelists

Chapter-3 Protest in the novels of Toni Morrison

(*The Bluest Eye, Sula, Beloved and Jazz*)

Chapter-4 Protest in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa

(*The Crow Eaters, The Pakistani Bride, Cracking India and Water*)

Chapter-5 The idiom of Protest

Chapter-6 Conclusion

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